

TESTIMONY OF

SHANNON SULLIVAN, 14 years old

a Member of Teenangels

(TEENANGELS.ORG is a program of WiredSafety.org that empowers teens and preteens to help others stay safer online and in their use of interactive technologies)

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

JULY 10, 2006, 10:30 A.M.

Raritan Community College,

Conference Rm. A

Somerville, New Jersey

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Opening Statement:

Thank you for inviting me here today to share information about Teenangels, WiredSafety.org and how we can protect everyone online. My name is Shannon Sullivan, and I am 14 years old from New Jersey. I will begin 10th grade in the fall. I have been a Teenangel for one year. I became one after my mother found out I had a MySpace. I had the opportunity of testifying before this sub-committee on the opening day of the hearings in Washington, following the testimony of Justin Berry.

I have recently been honored by Teen People Magazine as a representative of Teenangels for our role in helping change the world. That is a big challenge. But it is one that teens can live up to.

Teenangels are more than teens who learn how to use the Internet and other interactive technologies more safely. They are experts who advise many leading corporations. They have become well-known for their special insight into technology from a teen's perspective. Teenangels now advise major corporations on Internet and technology uses, including Disney, the CTIA, Microsoft, AOL, Yahoo!, Marvel and others. They assist law enforcement agencies in designing more effective undercover investigation methods. They work with large industry groups, such as the Motion Picture Association of America, in building educational programs and public service messages.

They have helped create safer interactive gaming technologies, safer cell phone features and more secure social networking programs. They have hosted briefings at the House of Parliament, conducted training for law enforcement agencies and written articles for leading magazines. They do presentations within their community for parents, students and senior citizens on safe use of the Internet and new interactive technologies. They spend a great deal of time on Internet sexual predators issues, anti-piracy and cyberbullying. We teach good cybercitizenship and responsible technology use, not only safety and privacy.

Teenangels are 13-18 year olds who train in all aspects of Internet and interactive technology safety, security and responsible use. (Tweenangels is the younger and lighter version of Teenangels, comprised of 9 to 12 year olds.) Once we are trained by Parry Aftab, leading law enforcement agencies and industry leaders around the world, these special teen experts create their own programs to teach safe and responsible technology use.

Some Teenangels are technological experts, creating animations, Flash applications, videos and computer games that help deliver their messages. Others concentrate on law and policy. Many have good public speaking, research or writing skills. The best thing about Teenangels is that it helps young people develop their own talents and help others at the same time.

We challenge teens and preteens, "Think you know more than most adults about the Internet? Share what you know, and learn more from the experts. Be part of the solution. Be a Teenangel!"

It is important that we teach young people that being safe isn't lame. That it's not cool to pretend you were out drinking all weekend, or to pose in your bra online. Many teens and preteens are lying about their ages to use social networking websites. And when they are there, they are often

doing high risk things. But, it's important that parents understand that most teens and preteens are using the technology safely and responsibly. We just need to address them in our own language.

Recently, Teenangels began working with Nick Lachey. When Parry wasn't able to attend a luncheon with Teen People introducing me (she was in Spain launching her new book), Nick came instead. He learned that Internet sexual predators were using his name to lure teens into sending sexual pics online. Since he first met Parry he has donated his time to helping us keep kids safer. He is even helping us with public service announcements and a fun new animated educational series we are producing using Teenangels to teach safer and more responsible technology use.

Teenangels is now working with Nick's new site, YFly.com, to help create a safer teen social networking site. We helped create Don't Be Stupid to teach teens that engaging in reckless behavior online is stupid, not cool.

As Teenangels, we have the mission of helping make the Internet safer. We need your help to do that. First I would like to thank you for helping us by providing funding. We just received an earmark from Congress, through the Department of Justice, for \$50,000. Since Teenangels hold bake sales and wash cars to raise money for our programs, this will change our world. We cannot thank you enough!

Next, I would like to share thoughts about what we can all do to help keep young people safer online.....

Why Teenangels works and how teens can help keep each other and themselves safer online:

- We are more than just teens who learn how to use the Internet and other interactive technologies safely. We are experts who advise many leading corporations
- It is a great program because its not teachers or parents just telling you another thing you shouldn't be doing, instead it's your friend, another teen, someone who is in the same situation you are and understands the trends and what all teens want to do.
- And an important part about TeenAngels is that there are more TeenAngels in state of New Jersey than any other state in country, or any other place in world
- More of us means more teens being taught about internet safety, more parents aware of the dangers of the internet, and a lot more teachers and schools involved in our fight for a safer internet for people of all ages

Kids do stupid things on the internet, we need to recognize that if we are going to try and address the problem:

- Pose in inappropriate pictures
- Post personal information
- Speak to people they don't really know

The answer is not getting rid of Social Networking

- Social Networking is here to stay
- I'm sure it has become a part of your teen's or teens you know lives
- It is the central communication for people of all ages
 - Bands posting when shows are

How Wiredsafety can help...

- WiredSafety is working with websites, law enforcements, parents, and schools to help create a total solution
- We don't want to get rid of social networking but there are so many ways to make it safer and more kid and teen orientated to protect our children
- There is not one answer to solving the problems with social networking

- Everyone needs to work together in order to solve the problems and to make sure social networking has more benefits than dangers
- And our Executive Director lives here in NJ too!

One answer is teaching kids and teens to thinkb4uclick!

- It is our job as TeenAngels and your job as elected officials, teachers, and parents to inform all kids of what not to do and what they are allowed to do on the internet
- If we explain the dangers and the consequences of posting personal information, posing in inappropriate picture, and speaking to people they do not know in real life to teens they would change their behavior and be a lot safer on the internet
- The problem not enough teens understand the dangers, they don't believe it will ever happen to them, but the fact is it can happen to anyone
- And a lot of parents are unaware and are almost afraid of finding out what their kids are doing. They feel very uncomfortable when using the computer. Parents to know what their kids are doing on the internet.
- Now when a parent tells a teenager or my mom tells me something to do I'm not necessarily going to listen or care as much as when my peer or another teen tells me to do something.
-

Learning from your mistakes

- When I was in 8th grade my friend set me up with a profile on myspace.com (tell story)
- I learned from my mistake and I understand that anything posted on the internet can be seen by anyone at anytime but teens need to learn from my mistake
- If we got teens to come out and tell their stories either about how they got in trouble on the internet or about the mistakes they've made then other teens would learn from what they did.

So what we need to do

- As well informed teens, elected officials, teachers, and parents its our job to teach kids and teens about the dangers of the internet, inform parents about what their children are doing on the computer, and give teachers and schools options about how to deal with social networking and each coming trend on the computer

Closing

- The internet is great learning tool and is great for people of all ages to use but if not used properly it can become extremely dangerous and hazardous to your children's lives. So if we all come together and work to make the internet safer and teach today's teens and tweens how to be safer than the internet will stay as a great learning tool for people of all ages.

Thank you for your time and caring enough to hold this hearing. And thank you for taking the time to listen to teens. It's nice to be included. And I will remember this day forever. On behalf of all my fellow Teenangels and Tweenangels, thank you.

Shannon Sullivan, age 14

New Jersey

Teenangels.org

Appendixes

Appendix A: (from Teenangels.org)

Safety Tips From the Mouths of Teenangels

(The Real Experts)...

While we have more extensive safety tip lists in Parry's book, here is a summarized version of the tips we thought were most important!

As Teenangels, safety is our biggest concern. So here are some tips and ideas that we and others have to share. Some of the best suggestions come from TEENS, just like you!

If you have a safety tip or story of something that has happened to you and how you handled it, please send it to us. We would love to hear from you! Email [Teenangels](mailto:Teenangels@teenangels.org).

Thoughts for Parents, Teens & Kids from the Teenangels

Parents... Don't be afraid of the Internet. It's an extremely useful tool & can't be dismissed because it is new & sometimes confusing. The Internet can be an excellent way for you & your children to bond & share a common interest. Be open with your kids & get involved. Most of all, learn all that you can about being safe, keeping your child safe, & taking advantage of the Internet's myriad uses. Tell your children not to be afraid to come to you with problems of any kind.

Teenagers...Although the Internet is a great way to meet new people, do research, and chat with friends, there are dangers. Be aware of these dangers. Always use common sense. Although you may think that bad things won't happen to you, they most certainly can. Be open with your parents about what you do online. Don't meet people offline that you met online! Make sure a site is secure and trustworthy before giving in your personal information. Obey the law and don't steal music, motion pictures and software! Balance the time you spend online and offline. Remember your friends in real life and don't take them for granted. Go outside & enjoy life beyond cyberspace.

Kids... While it's great to chat with people in kid-safe chat rooms online, you should spend time with friends in real life. School, family, & friends should always come before the Internet. Always tell your parents about what you do online. Let them sit with you, & teach them about the Internet. When they do sit with you, don't get mad at them. Just know they care about you & don't want to see you hurt in any way. Always remember that people online don't always tell the truth. Don't give out a lot of information about yourself. If anything bad ever happens to you on the Internet, always tell your parents or someone you trust. Always remember that it's never your fault.

Appendix B: Don't Be Stupid!

For Teens:



Don't Be Stupid!

What you need to know about cyberdating and staying safe

The Downers:

You never really know who someone is online. They may sound hot and their pic may be even hotter, but they could be someone you don't expect. They could be your little brother's snotty 12-year old friends having fun at your expense. Or three 15-year old mean girls posing as a heart throb to set you up for humiliation. Or they could be some 47 year old pervert. Either way, who needs it?

And even if it is a cute 16-year old guy or girl, there is no guarantee that when things are over, that sexy pic you shared with them won't end up on some website or profile somewhere. Or they could use the password you shared with them to change your profile, pose as you and harass your friends or even lock you out of your own account. Or they could cyberbully, flame, cyber-harass or cyberstalk you or your friends...When you breakup, all bets are off!

The Buck Stops Here...You Need to Protect Yourself Online

Smart teens have been fooled by slimy adults posing as teens. There is no safe way to meet someone you only know online, (with maybe from a few phone calls to help), in RL. If you're thinking about meeting someone, think again. Talk to your friends. Check out Katiesplace.org and learn about how others have been hurt by adults posing as teens. Smart teens like you. Don't do it!

We can't emphasize this enough! But, we also know that if you are convinced that this is a cute 16 year old boy or girl is the love of your life and destined for you from birth, you may ignore this advice and plan on meeting them in RL. If you are intent on taking this risk, do what you can to minimize it. Make sure you follow these Don't Be Stupid tips:

1. Don't disclose too much personal info. Start by assuming that the person on the other end is a predator. That means no full names, street addresses, RL schedules or telephone numbers that can be reverse searched (check it out online or where you work, or similar info about your friends that can be used to find you offline. It's always a good idea to use a disposable e-mail address or IM account, something you set up just for this and that you can drop if things start going downhill (like yahoo, hotmail or MSN.) Make sure that this new screen name doesn't give away any information about who you are in RL either (Tiff1991@[fill in the blank]).

2. Play detective. Photos can give away more information than you ever intended. Things in the background of the photo, like the license plate on your car, your house, the store where you work, the school or camp sweatshirt you're wearing or a pic with

you in front of your school can be risky. So can photos posted by your friends. While you may be very careful about what you are sharing online, they may not be as careful. If you link to their profile and haven't told anyone where you live, but they post their best friends (including you), everyone can now figure out what town you live in and where you go to school. They just need to cross-reference a bit. The same thing happens with everything you or your friends post. Look over your profile and the profile of your friends. If you were a detective for Law & Order, could you find yourself in RL? If so, change whatever is giving too many clues away. Password protect it and guard your password, and ask your friends to do the same. Start a rule - never post info about a friend or their pic without asking first.

3. Say Cheese! There are three issues about pics online - posting something you'll regret, shooting a lame pic or posting a pic that can be abused or misused by others. Sometimes to get attention, teens pose in provocative ways or snap a pic when they are doing things their parents would not want to see. Unfortunately, parents do see them. And so do principals and predators (and shortly college admission staff).

We all know that lame "MySpace" pose - bad lighting, cheeks sucked in, lips pursed, head tilted up, with a flash in the mirror. :-) Is that really how you want to be remembered?

Putting your best foot forward and using a good pic or a fun one is much better than doing the "I am so hot I can't stand it" pose. Boys posing shirtless and trying to make their pecs look bigger by crossing their arms underneath them, or girls posing in a bikini top (or worse) or very low cut pants will get you attention. But not the attention you may want. And cyberharassment where an innocent G-rated pic is manipulated and used to make you look bad or to morph your head on someone else's naked body is commonplace. You can avoid that by using photo-editing software to pixilate or blur the image, turn it into a sketch or cartoon, sepia or black and white. This makes your photos harder to abuse and less attractive to the harasser or a predator.

Our new Best Food Forward (BFF) tips teach you how to make the impression you want to make, without being lame or stupid. You can read about them at Teenangels.org or at our Don't Be Stupid tips at YFly.com. These will help you come across the way you want to online.

4. Look for the red flags. Beware of others online who:

- ask too many questions
- post things that don't make sense
- move too fast
- promise you ridiculous things (if it seems too good to be true, it's not true!)
- like everything that you like, exactly the way you like it
- know too much about you
- engage in cybersex
- just don't feel right or make you uncomfortable
- are evasive
- can't keep their story straight
- initiate sexual conversation or innuendo
- don't know the things most teens know (just know the experienced predators make it their business to know these things)
- pressure you to send sexy pics or meet in RL

- give you the creeps

5. ThinkB4Uclick. It's so easy to do things online that you would never do in RL. You don't have to look the other person in the eye. No one else is there to tell you to cool it. You are stronger, smarter, more empowered and braver online. You may not like your coach, principal or former best friend or boy or girl friend.

You take their pic and morph it onto someone else's naked body. You post sex ads using their name and contact info. Maybe you take a pic of them with your cell phone in a locker room, bathroom, at a slumber party or in the changing room at the Gap. You build a profile telling everyone what a slut they are, or post these pics online anonymously. Or you send sexual images of yourself to someone you like, thinking they will want to go out with you if they see how sexy you are. They don't, but share the pic with their fifty nearest and dearest friends - who show it to their friends and so on and so forth....

You think no one can find you, trace you or figure out who you are (you're wrong!). There is nothing between your impulse and your click...no time to think about it, no time to calm down. No time to use the "filter between your ears."

You are also typing fast and aren't proofreading your text-messages, IM or posts, and often send it to the wrong person on your buddy list or misspell their screen name. You may forget to type in "jk" or the word "not." You may find yourself in trouble without knowing why. Think R-E-S-P-E-C-T! (Now do it like Aretha, with lots of style!) Taking that extra second to make sure you send it to the right person, aren't misunderstood and are willing to be accountable for what you are doing and saying online is crucial. It will save you lots of grief later!

Appendix C

For Teens:

Finding Love in all the Cyberplaces...Don't Be Stupid!

If you decide to meet someone in-person, and ignore everything we taught you -- at least follow these tips and trust your gut. If something feels wrong, get out of there and report it. And remember that about 30% of the victims are boys. They just don't report it. So be careful!

1. Go public. Find out what they will be wearing and arrange for a place to meet. Then get there early and stake things out. The idea is to spot them before they spot you. Make sure that you meet in a well-lighted public place. It should be big and public enough so you can get help if you needed it, but not so big, crowded and noisy that you wouldn't be heard or couldn't get help. Don't meet in an amusement park, where screaming is part of the scenery. A mall is a good choice, but sit back and watch and see who shows up. If they are not what was promised, run...do not walk...home, to the security office or to the local police department. Make sure someone calls the police.

Never meet at your place or theirs. Never get in a car with them. Go with lots of friends (preferably Sumo wrestlers). Ignoring these tips could cost you your life. Really. Several smart teens have been killed in the US over the last four years by people they met online. Don't become a victim.

2. Bring backup. If you are going to meet, bring a lots of friends (preferably big ones :-)), and someone where you are going. Leave information about the person you are meeting. The bad guys will try and get you to erase the e-mails or bring your laptop or hard drive with you, so they can destroy the evidence. Best case scenario, trust your parents or another adult family member. This has saved more than one teen from being kidnapped, raped or killed.

3. Find your own ride. Don't accept a ride from them or offer a ride to them...even if they appear to be cute and cuddly. Stay in control of where you go and how you are going to get there and back. Bring a cell phone and make sure it's charged. Have others check in on you too.

4. Take it slow. Even if that's not your style, make it your style for any cyberdating situations. Just because they have told you their favorite bands, movies and food doesn't mean you have any idea who they really are. Treat it like a first date. It will feel weird at first. You feel closer than you would on a first date. They will know lots of things about you that you have shared. Often very personal things. But start from scratch. Don't move faster than you are comfortable doing and don't feel pressured. Keep others around for awhile as you get to know each other and trust your instincts.

5. Rat on the Creep! Your parents will kill you if they found out you met someone from the Internet in RL. But if you don't report it to someone, this creep may kill some teen in reality! Most of the time when police arrest an Internet sexual predator, they find lots of e-mails on their computer threatening to call the police if they bothered the teen one more time. Had someone actually called the police,

another teen might have been saved. Even if you won't tell your parents, find a way to report the creep. Check out Katiesplace.org for ways you can do that and more safety tips and real stories about real teens.

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Appendix D

For Teens:

Finding a Better Faith

A fictional account...

I thought I had met my dream guy. I really did. Now, I see where my mistake was, sure. It was in believing what I saw in the movies and on television. Believing what I read in magazines about true love and soul mates. I believed in the Madison Avenue picture of love, romance and happily ever after, and glossy views of happiness and popularity. I was taught these things my whole life by my everyone I knew and from books, movies, and songs. I was told that if I were good enough, thin enough, charming enough, pretty enough, and exciting enough my life would be fulfilling, happy and exciting. But no one ever tells you how dangerous this blind belief can be.

When I was a freshman in high school, I was miserable. I lived in one of those towns where the same kids are in your grade all the way through school, so everyone gets to know each other pretty well. They knew me in middle school when I had acne and bad clothing and was shy and self-conscious. And then I grew out of that, but no one much noticed. I know I was pretty in the year or two before I died because people started noticing me – people who didn't go to my school, who didn't remember how I used to be awkward.

And it felt good. I felt different and happy and hopeful. I thought to myself that maybe now I would have a boyfriend. Maybe he just couldn't find me before because I was shy and awkward, and it'll definitely happen now that I'm in high school and all the older boys can see how pretty I had become in the last few years. But it didn't. No one looked at me any differently than they ever had and I got depressed. I thought to myself that high school might just be middle school again – that maybe nothing would be different and I would have to go through three more years of being lonely and waiting until something better happened. For a while, I got resigned myself to this fate and then something changed and I got up one morning and said no. I think I said it out loud, actually, it's kind of funny to think of now. I decided that I would say no to this fate – that I wouldn't be alone and I wouldn't be miserable – not anymore. I decided that I would meet someone and I would have a boyfriend within a month or two – do or die – that I would take my life into my own hands. And that I did.

I started going online and searching for people to talk to – people who would be more mature and would understand me. I sorted through people's profiles on Friendster and Xanga.com and set up my own. And then I met someone, and it was just as easy as I ever dreamed it could be. We IMed for hours, about everything and I felt, for the first time, that someone really understood me. Sounds pretty silly now. We talked about our families, our dreams, books that had changed us – everything. I thought I was falling in love. I knew I had found "the one." I was the lucky one, and had found my soul mate early.

When he asked me if I wanted to meet, at first I said no, that I didn't know him well enough. He didn't push it, and instead, we started talking on the phone. He had a very deep voice, which didn't surprise me because he said he was 18, but it probably should have. Anyway, a month later he said he had to meet me. He said he couldn't stand it anymore – that he loved me – and said that if I wouldn't meet him he would come find me because if he didn't see me he'd die. In the end, it didn't quite work that way, though.

I realized that my parents would kill me if a random guy showed up at the house looking for me. I couldn't have that happen, so I agreed to meet him. It was stupid, I know, but I was told more time than one that it's okay to do stupid things when you're in love.

I met him at the mall, in the food court. He was 37, not 18. I started crying and told him that he lied to me and I never wanted to see him again. I felt betrayed, and confused. He handed me the rose he had brought and a book of poems. I just stared at them, having problems separating the 18 year old I knew so well, from

this man standing in front of me with tears rolling down his cheeks.

While he cried quietly, he told me that he loved me so much – that he knew I would never date him if I knew how old he was, which is true. I worked up the courage to leave. But he started making a big scene – pleading with me not to leave him. Telling me how much he loved and appreciated me, when no one else did. I was afraid someone I knew or who my family knew might see so I agreed – his last request – to go outside to talk.

He said he had a present for me in his car, and could he just give it to me. I said ok, probably the stupidest thing anyone's ever done. He clamped his hand over my mouth so no one could hear the screams. Then he pushed me in his car, throwing a blanket over me and holding me down so no one could see. He poured some smelly chemical over the blanket near my face. At first I held my breath, but finally had to take a breath. I knew I was in trouble, and felt dizzy immediately. I must have passed out. I don't know how long it was before I woke up, and realized this wasn't a horrible dream. It was real. He took me someplace in the woods, dragged me from the car and tied me up. He beat me, while he raped me, crying and telling me he loved me the whole time. I felt like my insides were being ripped out. That was how I lost my virginity. And my innocence. And more.

I still feel like it's all my fault. Why did I believe him? Why did I believe that anybody normal could be that into me? Even after all this time, the only answer I can come up with is that I had believed in make-believe. If I hadn't wanted to fall in love so badly, if I hadn't needed someone wanting me to validate how I felt about myself, I wouldn't have let my judgment get clouded. I would probably be alone in my room, depressed, but I'd be better off than I am now.

So believe in happily ever after, but reality too. It's okay to be hopeful because life would be too hard without it. But don't let it cloud your better judgment. Have faith in yourself and don't waste it on people who may or may not love you or save you or complete you. And don't trust people – at least for a while, at least till you know who they really are and what they are capable of. And never just because you talk with them online and on the phone and think you know them. Love and loneliness don't excuse stupid behavior, and they certainly don't buy you another chance to fix it.

I will never know what could have happened in my life – who I could have met or what I might have done, because he killed me before leaving my body for some hikers to find weeks later. I was almost unrecognizable. My parents had to identify me, and the hair, clothes and complexion I worked so hard to make perfect weren't even identifiable anymore. I was ashamed that I had done this to my parents, and my little sister, and most of all to myself.

My friends didn't envy my "kewl" new life. They, instead, mourned me, and even my dearest friends talked about how "stupid" I was.

My little sister couldn't stop sobbing. She held my hand, and clung to the casket when they tried to take it out of the church. I tried to hold her hand back, but nothing happened. I wanted to reach out and comfort her. But from now on, she wouldn't have a big sister to do that anymore. She couldn't climb into my bed and tell me about her kitten and why she wanted to be "just like me" when she grew up.

I hope she wouldn't be just like me. I hope she is smarter than I was, and not as trusting. Not as naive

I wish I had a second chance. I wish I could warn others about this kind of thing. But I can't. I'm dead.

This "love of my life", my "soul mate" didn't only rob me of my innocence and any chance at happiness – I'll never know if I could have made it. I never got a fair shot. If you're in the same situation I was in, I can't say if it'll ever get better, or if you'll ever be successful, or rich, or pretty, or lose the weight, or get the guy, but I can say you better hang around and try, because I'd do just about anything for the second chance. A chance to find someone real. A chance to know if I could have been happy.

Appendix E

About Teenangels from a school technology director in Wisconsin:

About 5 years ago, I got a phone call from one of the parents in our school district asking that her daughter's Internet and email privileges be revoked. She decided that her daughter would no longer be allowed to be part of the "Cyber World."

When I spoke more with this parent, I learned that the daughter had been harassed online. She had given out personal information and was now receiving inappropriate emails and phone calls at her home.

I immediately looked for resources online to help this family. The Internet is such an incredible resource – I wanted to find a way to convince the family that education regarding Internet use was a better solution than instituting a complete ban for their high school daughter.

As a result of my searches, I happened on information about Parry – I contacted her and she agreed to speak at a school assembly with a parent information meeting to follow. After Parry's talk, I literally had a line of students in my office – these students wanted to help other teens to be safe online. From that group, our TeenAngel chapter was started.

The Teens devoted an entire Spring Break to intensive training and the rest is history. Our TeenAngel chapter works to educate Teens (and parents) about online safety. We have a "Tech" division that works on programming and helps community members with problems ranging from P.C. trouble to instructions on virus removal.

Our teens are highly motivated and highly technologically savvy. Among other things, our group has attended the Wired Kids Summit in Washington D.C. working with legislators and corporate executives to help make the Internet a safer place for kids. One of our teens was featured on "The John Walsh Show" in their "Hometown Hero" segment. Locally, our teens have presented to numerous school, church, and parent groups as well as presented at state conferences focusing on issues relevant to Teens.

This is a great program. In our high school, it has become a place and program for our "Tech" guys to devote their energy and talent.

Appendix F

From Katiesplace.org, written by one of our Teenangels who wants to teach others how to avoid being victimized in the way she had been.

When Your Mentor Becomes Your Tormentor - Alicia's Story

You never notice yourself growing. It's so gradual, so smooth a process that the daily or even monthly changes are simply undetectable. Mirrors don't help – its only in comparing photographs, in seeing yourself at different stages, that one can notice the differences.

My relationship online with Mac grew just that slowly. When we were first introduced online, he was courteous and interested and subtle, none of those childish IMs which are so common, among young teens, flaunting their new-found sexuality like so many new toys. He didn't try to have cyber sex with me, didn't make crude comments or ask me to go on the webcam. It doesn't work like that. He was thoughtful and gentle and nice, and, of course, entirely deceptive, and so we became friends. Just friends. And it was all very innocent - for a time.

It was in the slowest, least noticeable way that he eased me into a more intimate relationship online. He was an expert, but, of course, I didn't know that at the time. The way the conversation moved into more personal territory never felt threatening because it moved so slowly. We would talk for a few minutes more each day, about something a little more personal each day, and some days we could talk about nothing personal at all. He never pushed, never insisted and so convinced me that I wanted to tell him personal things, or 'parrot' those things that he so wanted to hear from me. And I did.

So we talked about everything – not just the sexual stuff. He was interested in me, as a person – my thoughts, my goals, my relationships with friends and family members. He gave me adult advice and always took my side. He was my advocate, unconditionally, at a time in my early teenage life where that was just what I needed. School was: well it was school, mean girls and nasty boys and everyone trying to be all that they're not- And my family and I, were very close, but we didn't always see eye-to eye about everything, sometimes they just seemed to think that I was still a child. But there was always Mac, and I could count on him to see things my way Always online. Always ready to talk. Always on my side. It was the most comforting thing imaginable.

Soon enough, he wasn't just someone that I could trust, he became the someone I needed – I began to believe that he was the only one I could depend on to understand the real me, which is exactly what he wanted, of course. Somehow, in this process, this grooming of me, he had changed me, had destroyed my ability to reason. Imagine, I walked out the door, right out of my own front door into the darkest iciest winter night, with no money and no coat, to meet a madman who I thought was my best friend. Was I crazy? No. Was I duped? Entirely. When I review it all, comparing my mental photographs of our relationship at different times, I think, how could it have happened? How could my sanity, my reason, my mental state have decayed like that – how did he make me shrink away to nothing? How could I have gone from being a smart, sane girl having casual conversations with an online friend to doing something I would have sworn I could never do –who... shy timid little me?—never!!!!- meeting a total stranger in the dark, cold night – leaving home in the middle of a happy, loving, family holiday meal? My only answer is that I wasn't crazy – I was just under the spell of an incredibly skillful manipulator who knew that slow and steady wins the race – or at least the hearts of young girls. He took me apart and put me back together and bit by bit, day by day, byte by byte, he became the focus of my life and the one who understood me best. Why wouldn't I want to meet someone like that IRL? It felt right.

And yet it was so wrong. The moment he persuaded me into the car, I immediately knew that I was in trouble. I knew. I had this terrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as we drove down my street, out of my neighborhood, and then, onto the turnpike. Trapped "Quiet" he said. "Let's keep the trunk empty." I kept my eyes cast down, stealing quick furtive glances up at him from the corners of my eyes. Somehow, I instinctively knew that he was like a savage beast, and that I had only to make full eye contact to engage

his anger, to force him to attack. I stared down at his shoes as we drove. At his pants, his socks, I studied them, eyes cast down. I could describe it all to you today – that image, that feeling, trapped ...it will haunt me forever. Those hours sitting there, the waiting....

What terrible fate awaited me when we arrived at his home? I never envisioned anything as terrible as the reality. When we arrived at his home it was – worse than even I had imagined it could be. It was way worse than a bad after-school movie. It was Friday the 13th and Texas- Chainsaw-Massacre! And he had it planned – days before, maybe months before, maybe the first time we ever spoke. I was stripped, tortured, beaten. Raped. Those words still stick to the roof of my mouth and are glued thickly to my tongue. I listened through the windows to cars passing by, to the voices of neighboring families going out for lunch and to the mall and coming home again at night, yet there I remained, collar around my neck, chained to a post, naked. This was me at age 13. Waiting for death. How would he do it? Would he stab me, would I bleed to death, my blood adding yet another stain to the filthy carpet? Would he beat me to death with whips and fists, chained helpless, unable to defend myself?

Into this morbid fantasy, unbidden, a fairy tale that my mother had read to me while tucked warm and safe into my silken little ‘blankie’ kept flashing into my mind. The one of an Arabian slave girl held captive by her master. The tale unfolds that at the moment her stories ceased to entertain him, to amuse him - then he would kill her, with this in mind, the helpless slave fought for her life with the only weapon she had - her mind... And she became my inspiration. I would persevere, I would not die. My captor would not win this battle. I knew that my family loved me, that they would move heaven and earth to find me. But I had to stay alive until they did. So I struggled, silently, determined to win back the life I had left behind. My life that somehow had seemed to become so empty, so sad... why? I understood now, in those cold hours alone, waiting for the monster’s return, it all began to come clear. I wanted my life back! I wanted to feel my mom’s gentle kisses good-night and my dad’s crushing hugs, I wanted to run outside into the sun, to add my voice to the other happy children’s, far, far away from the dark coldness of his dungeon. I wanted to experience anything – anything - except what was happening to me. I desperately wanted to live!

So I waited it out. I prayed. It might not seem, to you, like the most courageous thing to do – I didn’t fight him, didn’t engage his anger. But, somehow, I knew that he would kill me, throw me away like trash in some cold shallow grave if I resisted anymore. He enjoyed my pain. So, I just wasn’t there I left – mentally anyway. This wasn’t happening to me. I escaped into my head and tried desperately to hang on to my sanity. It took my whole being to merely breathe. One breath at a time I waited for my death. I knew that one wrong move would cost me my life and so I simply waited, telling myself “today, yeah today they’ll find me... rescue me,” convincing myself that this would not be how it all ends, that my parents would not find their only daughter’s dead and battered body in this evil man’s filthy house. I couldn’t, I wouldn’t, let it end that way. So I resolved to live. Breath by breath. Moment by moment.

And I did. I made it through, a miracle of survival, when so many other girls have been less fortunate. And I can’t say if it was faith, or luck, or personal resolve that saved me. And it doesn’t really matter. I truly feel that something greater than myself has directed me. I am alive. I was given the second chance that so many others had been denied.

I promised myself in those dark and painful days and endless nights that if I were spared, if I were given a second chance at life, I would share my horror, to teach others - maybe you - how to avoid becoming his next victim. I would help them understand that the mentor you thought you found online might become the tormenter who steals your heart, your innocence and your faith in mankind. And ultimately, **your life**.... Mac failed. While the emotional and physical scars may last a lifetime, he didn’t shake my faith in myself or in mankind. He may have stolen days, weeks, months, he may have taken my childhood, but the rest of my life is mine. And I have reclaimed it. I will not allow him to torment me anymore. Only I have the power to control my future. I refuse to be defined by his betrayal of my trust, by his cruel sadistic acts or by those dark days, however devastating they may have been. I have a mission and an important role to play. I want to inspire others to move on, past their exploitation, to find their own life mission. I was spared and given a second chance. And I don’t intend to waste it. I will continue to speak to young people and dedicate my life to helping catch criminals, like Mac. I am also helping, here, to build KatiesPlace.org and as a volunteer with WiredSafety.org and others.

So, please don't remember me as the girl who was torn, twisted, confused, lured abducted and abused. Remember me for what I will accomplish. Please don't let this tragedy define me. I am so much more than that. And so are you. Join me in this mission. Together we can change the world, one child, and one life at a time. You can read about miraculous rescues and the dedicated and courageous men and woman responsible for bringing victimized children to safety here at KatiesPlace.org. And you can e-mail me through this site. **Please, be safe...be aware...**